

NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant Program  
Grant HD-50572

White Paper

**Vernacular Music Material Culture  
in Space and Time**

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## Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>Project Background.....</b>	<b>3</b>
	Project Title and Activities: Vernacular Music Material Culture in Space and Time...	3
	Statement of Problem.....	3
	Advisory Board Members.....	3
<b>II.</b>	<b>Accomplishments, Audiences, and Evaluations: Two-Day Meeting of the Advisory Board for the “Test Case”: The Banjo Sightings Database Project.....</b>	<b>4</b>
	Background of the Two-Day Meeting.....	4
	Focus on the Banjo (test case).....	4
	Focus on the “Bigger Picture” (music instruments in general).....	5
	Primary Points of Discussion: Objectives and Indicators.....	5
	<i>Objective 1: Establish and Outline Requirements.....</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Indicator 1.1: Technical Requirements.....</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Indicator 1.2: Content Requirements.....</i>	<i>6</i>
	<i>Indicator 1.3: Intellectual Property and Other Legal Considerations and Requirements.....</i>	<i>8</i>
	<i>Indicator 1.4: Protocol Requirements.....</i>	<i>9</i>
	<i>Objective 2: Creating a Banjo Sightings Database Work Plan: Putting the Project into Perspective.....</i>	<i>9</i>
	<i>Indicator 2.1: Clarify tasks that will ensure project development.....</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>Indicator 2.2: Produce an action plan that outlines next steps.....</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>Indicator 2.3: Describe what an NEH Level II Start-Up Grant proposal should look like.....</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>Objective 3: Identifying Stakeholders for Long-Term Maintenance, Sponsorship, Partnership, and Development.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Continuation of the Project.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>13</b>

## I. Project Background

### **Project Title and Activities: Vernacular Music Material Culture in Space and Time**

Level I Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant funding (\$13,889, outright) was awarded to the fiscal sponsor Piedmont Folk Legacies, Inc. (PFL), a not-for-profit 501(c)(3), of Eden, North Carolina to support “planning activities for the creation of a proof-of-concept knowledge management system to allow researchers to study the development and performance history of music instruments, using the banjo as a test case.”<sup>1</sup> The planning period of April-September 2009 allowed Greg C. Adams (Project Director and Principal Investigator) and George Wunderlich (Co-Principal Investigator) to convene a two-day meeting (held on June 4-5, 2009) with an Advisory Board to discuss the test case, entitled the Banjo Sightings Database Project (BSD). The purpose of the two-day meeting was to allow Adams and Wunderlich to draw on the Advisory Board’s knowledge and expertise to address key objectives and indicators (see Appendix 1), develop a foundation for a functional project work plan, and outline next steps. The remaining portion of the planning period was designed for Adams to conduct follow-up research, outreach, and shift the Project toward Level-II funding. This White Paper reflects the work carried out during the planning period.

#### **Statement of Problem**

Few music instruments are more closely linked to American history than the banjo. From its origins in the 17th century Caribbean as an African American folk instrument through its 19th century transformation into a centerpiece of American popular culture, the banjo is an iconic instrument whose West African heritage is woven into the multicultural fabric of the American experience. As scholars, musicians, and enthusiasts continue to discover new information about the early banjo, there is no available system in which to maintain, interact with, and collectively analyze this important data. The proposed Banjo Sightings Database Project will combine information about rare and widely dispersed primary source material (circa 1620–1870) with appropriate and innovative technological applications, resulting in a system that not only catalogs information about the early banjo, but also establishes an interactive, peer-reviewed knowledge management system. Users will be able to explore the early banjo from structural, cultural, and historical perspectives.

#### **Advisory Board Members**

- **Bruce Ambacher, Ph.D.**, College of Information Studies, University of Maryland
- **James F. Bollman**, Collector, Author, Banjo Historian
- **Rex Ellis, Ph.D.**, National Museum of African American History and Culture (serving in a personal capacity)
- **John Huerta**, General Counsel, Smithsonian Institution (retired), Collector
- **Kari Kraus, Ph.D.**, College of Information Studies, University of Maryland
- **Darcy Kuronen**, Curator of Musical Instruments, Museum of Fine Art, Boston
- **Thomas Scheinfeldt, Ph.D.**, Managing Director, Center for History and New Media, George Mason University
- **Peter Szego**, Early Banjo Scholar, Collector
- **Robert B. Winans, Ph.D.**, Professor Emeritus, Gettysburg College, Banjo Scholar, Collector

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from *National Endowment for the Humanities, Awards and Offers*, March 2009 ([http://neh.gov/news/archive/pdf/Awards\\_09Mar\\_Pt3\\_NCtoWI.pdf](http://neh.gov/news/archive/pdf/Awards_09Mar_Pt3_NCtoWI.pdf))

## II. Accomplishments, Audiences, and Evaluations: Two-Day Meeting of the Advisory Board for the “Test Case”: The Banjo Sightings Database Project

### *Background of the Two-Day Meeting*

The Two-Day Meeting of the Advisory Board for the Banjo Sightings Database Project was held at the National Museum for Civil War Medicine in Frederick, MD, on June 4-5, 2009. Despite the demanding schedules of each Advisory Board member, James Bollman was the only member unable to attend the actual event. He did receive all correspondence regarding the meeting and all planning period materials to stay informed on progress. In preparation for the Two-Day Meeting, Advisory Board members were provided with a preliminary meeting agenda, preparatory instructions, a schedule for the two-day event, and the schema for the current Banjo Sightings Database prototype ([www.banjodatabase.org](http://www.banjodatabase.org)) (see Appendices 2, 3, and 4). The actual Two-Day Meeting proved to be a highly efficient use of each attendee’s time, knowledge, and expertise. As reflected in the original proposal application, three overarching themes framed the two-day meeting: 1) focusing discussion on the banjo as a “test case,” 2) shifting conversation toward the “bigger picture,” the broader application to music instruments in general, and 3) using the *Objectives and Indicators* submitted to NEH as part of the original project proposal as the foundation for all formal discussion.

### *Focus on the Banjo (the test case)*

The initial exchange between Adams, Wunderlich, and Advisory Board members began with the questions, “Why the banjo?” and “Why the Banjo Sightings Database?” Discussions covered two areas—the story of the banjo as a research topic and the deeper, untapped value in using the banjo as a test case for the Project. First, as a research topic, the single, most important factor driving the Banjo Sightings Database Project is that it is **not** based on an old story recounting generations of scholarly inquiry. While many scholars, musicians, and listeners have long appreciated and acknowledged the musical offerings provided by generations of banjo players, a deeper interest in the complex multicultural history of the banjo has only taken hold in recent decades (e.g., Dena Epstein’s *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*, 1977, 2003). Knowledge bearers of the banjo’s deeper early history include scholars, collectors, historians, musicians, amateur researchers, and enthusiasts. Yet, only in the last twenty years has the material culture of the early banjo become increasingly available. Significant portions of these primary sources are often in the hands of private collectors. For example, if researchers wish to conduct an analysis of extant early banjos, they must receive a personal invitation from one of at least 55 private collectors who maintain 181 of the 207 known earliest surviving instruments.<sup>2</sup> The development of a readily-accessible, comprehensive, and socially-interactive website and database of banjo history will not only present what is currently known about the early banjo, but also promote the continued investigation of this iconic instrument and its importance to America’s musical, cultural, and historical landscape.

<sup>2</sup> This information is based on the inventory initially developed by George Wunderlich, but that is now expanded and maintained by Greg C. Adams of all known early banjos and their current locations.

Second, the Advisory Board reached a general consensus for the timeliness of focusing on the banjo as a test case and its untapped value within the Digital Humanities. For the banjo, in particular, the Banjo Sightings Database Project offers the chance for researchers to more deeply explore the banjo as an African American instrument, whose provenance crossed many geographic, racial, ethnic, social, commercial, and cultural borders. In this environment, the information maintained about banjo-related primary source material will reflect the many types of culturally encoded content present throughout the history of slavery, emancipation, and reconstruction. As part of a broader, general application, the Banjo Sightings Database Project will serve as a model for how researchers might study the development, migration, transformation, and dissemination of any music instrument.

*Focus on the “Bigger Picture” (music instruments in general)*

Throughout the entire two-day meeting Advisory Board members regularly revisited the importance of thinking about the Project’s broader applicability to music instruments in general and largely agreed that the banjo was an excellent test case because of its multidisciplinary implications. As part of this broader application, Advisory Board member Darcy Kuronen emphasized how organizations like the American Musical Instrument Society would strongly desire a system like the one proposed in the Banjo Sightings Database Project for any number of types of music instruments. The Advisory Board identified other organizations that would benefit from this project including IMLS, CIM-CIM, The Getty, Smithsonian Institution, Historical Brass Society, Galpin Society, and a variety of university and museum systems. Ultimately, the concepts discussed revolved around the idea of 1) capturing information about primary source material, regardless of format (for any type of music instrument), 2) linking it to both professional and vernacular knowledge about the instrument, and 3) creating outputs that will be useful to scholars, educators, musicians, and the general public.

*Primary Points of Discussion: Project Objectives and Indicators*

In accord with the *Objectives and Indicators* submitted to NEH as part of the original October 2008 Level-I Start-Up Grant proposal (see Appendix I), Adams, Wunderlich, and the members of the Advisory Board systematically discussed each point with the following results:

*Objective 1: Establish and Outline Requirements:*

*Indicator 1.1: Technical Requirements:* The Banjo Sightings Database Project has the potential to become a knowledge discovery tool for a wide variety of users and stakeholders, from the serious researcher to the casual browser. Establishing a front-end website that will include a back-end database system is part of a short-term series of goals. During the Two-Day Meeting, attendees discussed several potential platforms for the Banjo Sightings Database Project, including *Omeka*, *Joomla*, *Drupal*, and *Content DM* (content management systems) and highlighted other pertinent applications that

could also have supplemental use like *Word Press*, *Wikis*, and social networking sites such as *Facebook*, *MySpace*, and *Ning.com*.

*Omeka* received particular attention as an example of one of several potential content management systems with optimal features. Open source and free, *Omeka* provides website and database components that are scalable to other applications, follows DublinCore-based international metadata standards, and can be formatted with a series of programming outputs such as searching, browsing, configuring data to maps, and other multimedia options (e.g., audio-video, images, recorded sound). Furthermore, *Omeka*'s database component can be linked to a "commons" area where content from other *Omeka*-based systems are aggregated for wider use while content can be organized to create online exhibits and populate teaching sites.

As part of the technical requirements for the Project, attendees also addressed questions about system maintenance and data and information integrity. Because *Omeka* is open source, programmers can more quickly identify and reconcile "bugs" within the system. While Adams will initially manage much of the proposed database's content, other stakeholders and users will receive graded access to the system in order to contribute, maintain, and review content. For example, users who wish to contribute interpretive information or register an instrument for inclusion will be given specific types of access based on their knowledge, credentials, and ability to offer a peer-reviewed response to content.

Finally, the participation of private collectors, which is completely voluntary, is essential to the success of this project. Since much of the primary source material used to drive the Banjo Sightings Database concept is maintained privately, the Project must be vigilant in protecting the personal information of private collectors who often maintain their collections within the privacy of their own homes. *Omeka* can be programmed to allow user access without divulging private or personal information. For example, if a private collector individually contributes information about his or her collection to the Project through a computer interface, *Omeka* can provide a protocol that gives the collector the choice as to whether or not they want to publicly link their names to the content in the database.

*Indicator 1.2: Content Requirements:* Advisory Board members discussed a minimum of three types of banjo-focused content that will populate the database component of the proposed system. First, the database will serve as a repository and work site that maintains content submitted, authored, and interpreted by *knowledge bearers*. Second, they explored the data sets that define each anticipated "banjo sighting" according to its *physical attributes*. Third, the Advisory Board discussed how intellectual and physical *relationships* between objects and artifacts can be mapped within the system.

Two overarching groups of *knowledge bearers* maintain essential information about banjos and banjo-related primary source material. The first group consists of professional scholars, including, for example, ethnomusicologists, folklorists, historians, educators, and other formally trained and affiliated researchers. The members in the second group consist of people who tend to work independently or are not necessarily affiliated with a university or professional institution. These include, for example, collectors, musicians, amateur historians, and other enthusiasts whose knowledge is not maintained with the

same types of infrastructure that are often available to members of the first group. In many cases, these two groups seldom have the opportunity to interact with one another in ways that result in a clearer understanding of the history and context of the banjo, but can result in misunderstanding, entrenched views, and counter-productive, non-dialectic interaction. This project will provide a means for both groups to continue refining their knowledge about the cultural history of the banjo through access to primary source material and a forum in which they can actively peer-review the work of other researchers.

In order for this type of interaction to be successful, content about primary source material must be maintained efficiently. As of now, each “banjo sighting” can be analyzed based on its *physical attributes* (see Figure 1):

1. Extant instruments
2. Renderings of banjos as found in sheet music, photographs, paintings, drawings, and other period sources
3. Contemporary written accounts or text-based descriptions and references of banjo construction and performance



Figure 1: Examples of “banjo sightings.” From left to right: Extant banjo attributed to early commercial banjo manufacturer William Boucher, Jr. (ca 1846-1850); rendering of an early banjo in “The Old Plantation” (detail) (ca 1790); textual reference to the “banger” (banjo) from the New York Weekly Journal (March 7, 1736)

Extant instruments are generally made with gourd, calabash, or wooden hoop resonators, necks of varying shapes, sizes, and materials, and unique craftsmanship where most surviving instruments are literally one-of-a-kind (since commercial banjo manufacturing was only in its infancy in the 1840s and 1850s). Images of the early banjo begin to appear by the late 17th century and continue to surface in almost every historical medium—hand drawings, etchings, paintings, lithographs, sheet music covers, and photography. Throughout its early history, European and European-American observers were almost exclusively the authors of period descriptions about banjos, banjo players,



and musical performances. These descriptions are significant in that they help researchers contextualize the provenance of the banjo as an instrument of the African Diaspora.

In order to effectively capture the information about primary source references, Adams and Wunderlich have been working to normalize how banjo-related content can be accessed, discussed, and interpreted. They developed a preliminary controlled vocabulary to describe the physical attributes of all early banjos as well as essential measurements for preservation, conservation, and reconstruction purposes.

The proposed database can be programmed to allow users to identify and maintain specific types of *relationships*, one of which is present in the current prototype database found at [www.banjodatabase.org](http://www.banjodatabase.org). This system demonstrates specific relationships between different “banjo sightings” based on a single instrument’s provenance. Users can identify relationship types based on how a single banjo-related “object” can be expressed as a series of inter-related artifacts. For example, a surviving banjo built in 1847, photographed with its owner in 1850, and described in a written account from 1862 is, in actuality, a series of three extant representations of the same instrument. While each representation is individually documented in a separate entry according to its format, the database will show that they are in fact the same object. Identifying these types of relationships avoids redundancy while also establishing an important historical network. This function can also be configured to demonstrate banjo sightings from various geographic regions, those sharing specific construction characteristics, eyewitness accounts, and any other structural or analytical perspectives. As part of the applicability of the Project to musical instruments in general, Advisory Board members emphasized comparing this preliminary controlled vocabulary and series of measurements to those descriptive standards outlined by Dublin Core, the Getty Museum’s Categories for the Description of Works of Art (CDWA), the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH), as well as other organological systems.

The multimedia outputs for the Project will initially consist of a website, database, interface for interpreted content, and digital images. Once the system is more fully established, future plans will incorporate content from the “environment scan” in the Level I Start-Up Grant application. Some of the content will include linking data to interactive maps and timelines, creating audio of new performances that combine original instruments with original sheet music sources from as early as the 1850s, video components demonstrating known early playing techniques, and three-dimensional imaging of select extant instruments to allow users to more closely engage the real nuance of the early banjo. Finally, outputs must also be flexible so that users can organize query results according to their own research needs.

*Indicator 1.3: Intellectual Property and Other Legal Considerations and Requirements:* In addition to technical and content requirements, the Banjo Sightings Database Project must be able to intellectually and legally protect itself as well as its partners and stakeholders. During the Two-Day Meeting, Advisory Board members discussed how the Project must be connected with an organization that can provide access to legal counsel. Issues that the Project must address include intellectual property rights, discerning what is in the public domain, formal agreements, and contracts. As part of this process, discussions covered the general process of drafting legal documents, identifying agreement types that will be used throughout the Project, and some of the



legal issues that affect the long-term management of the data and the Project:

The general process to be followed in **drafting legal documents** includes (but is not limited to):

- 1) Consulting a lawyer (if Project is University-based, in-house counsel will be used);
- 2) Compiling similar documents from other projects and entities to review language used; and,
- 3) Making modifications to these documents so that they will be legally binding on the proposed project, its managers, volunteers and stakeholders (i.e., anyone who directly participates or interacts with the project).

**Identifying types of agreements** that will be used throughout the Project:

- 1) Between (a) the Project and (b) its employees and volunteers (including advisory board members), (c) private collectors, (d) museums, libraries, and other publicly accessible collections; and,
- 2) Between (a) the Project and (b) third-party submissions (e.g., someone who wishes to submit data or banjo-related information through a web-based interface).

**Addressing legal issues** in the long-term management of data by:

- 1) Maintaining (a) confidentiality, (b) intellectual property (copyright, trademark, possibly patent issues) (c) ethical standards, and (d) protocol between the Project and stakeholders; and,
- 2) Identifying transferability issues from one generation of Project Managers (i.e., the incumbent director) and the successor director covering confidentiality, intellectual property, ethics, and protocols.

*Indicator 1.4: Protocol Requirements:* Project participation from public institutions, private collectors, and other stakeholders is completely voluntary. In order to successfully promote widespread participation in the Project, at least three types of requirements will shape protocols. First, solicitation of content for the database component of the Project will occur between a representative of the Project and a contributor. These solicitations will occur in two ways—content solicited by the Project from a potential contributor and content offered by a potential contributor to the Project. Second, these communications will occur through several methods: in person (e.g., onsite or at a predefined location), electronically (e.g., email, website interface), with remote verbal communication (e.g., telephone, mobile, Skype), or through traditional means (e.g., postal correspondence). Third, the transfer of information and content must occur through Project-sanctioned representatives or web applications. As part of this type of interaction, project representation must consist of clear statements/communications about the mission of the Project, how the contributor's content will be used, and how the contributor is intellectually linked to the content.

*Objective 2: Creating a Banjo Sightings Database Work Plan: Putting the Project into Perspective*

*Indicators 2.1 and 2.2: Clarify tasks that will ensure Project development and Produce an action plan that outlines next steps:* Advisory Board members discussed several key short-term objectives that should serve as “next steps” for the Project. First, they recommended identifying and approaching potential partners for the Project. Likely partners for the Project include university and museum systems, cultural institutions, and special interest organizations. This activity will contribute to finding a “home” for the Project as part of a long-term objective in project management, not only while Adams directs progress, but also beyond Adams’ personal, long-term involvement. Second, they emphasized securing funds to hire technology experts to begin implementing the website and database component of the Project (see Indicator 2.3). Long-term focus would more closely align with the “bigger picture” by developing a metadata standard for describing any instrument type and determining how current standards might be modified to meet project needs. Third, the Project requires guidance from general counsel to begin drafting formal agreements to be used between the Project and various stakeholders, especially as the Project continues to generate traction both online and through onsite data collecting exercises.

*Indicator 2.3 Describe what an NEH Level II Start-Up Grant proposal should look like:* An NEH Level II Start-Up Grant proposal should include at least three essential deliverables as pertains to a database and website component aimed specifically at the banjo as the “test case.” First, a) define a standardized set of descriptive elements (e.g., measurements) and b) establish a controlled vocabulary applicable to all banjo content within the selected content management system. If *Omeka* becomes the selected system, then its standard DublinCore metadata sets would require extensions to meet the needs of the banjo-focused content. Second, Level II funding will primarily cover technology and programming needs of the Project. A programmer would need to work with the Project Director (Adams) in order to create the infrastructure as well as interfaces that demonstrate physical/structural relationships between each “banjo sighting” as well as browsing and search features. Third, the sample data housed in the current prototype ([www.banjodatabase.org](http://www.banjodatabase.org)) will be transferred to the new system and made available to the banjo specialists and technology specialists affiliated with the Project for testing, troubleshooting, and preliminary public launch.

*Objective 3: Identifying Stakeholders for Long-Term Maintenance, Sponsorship, Partnership, and Development:*

*Indicator 3.1: Continue to identify institutions, groups, and individuals interested in contributing to the Project, acting as sponsors, and participating in the future development of the Banjo Sightings Database Project:* Because of the Project’s potential impact as part of the “bigger picture,” Advisory Board members recommended sharing information about the Project as a gesture toward gaining practical support as well as establishing a broader public awareness of the Project’s goals. In September and October 2009, Adams began formally posting information about the Project to eight listservs: Society for Ethnomusicology, H-Southern-Music, Sonneck Society, American Musical Instrument Society, American Musicological Society, Music Library Association, H-Material-Culture, and Maryland Traditions (see Appendix 5 for a sample of one of these

listserv posts). Postings to these eight listservs generated at least fifteen responses. All of the responses included best wishes for success, recommendations for people to contact about the Project, and general advice about what might enhance the Project's offerings. Few people considered offering practical support in the way of direct collaboration or a potential partnership for the Project, however. This response may be attributable to a) a lack of knowledge or interest about the banjo or banjo history, b) greater interest if the Project was directly applicable to other music instruments besides the banjo, c) limitations created by current professional and familial obligations, or d) the need for an alternate method for "selling" the Project.

In addition to the listserv posts, Adams scheduled and attended three meetings to discuss the Project with representatives of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH) at the Smithsonian, representatives of Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH), and members of the Ethnomusicology Department at the University of Maryland (UMD). Favorably, attendees at each of these meetings felt the warrant, reasons, and incentives driving the banjo as a "test case" were valid and important. Alternately, engaging the Project with the banjo as a "test case" fell outside of the scope of each group's current mission or agendas. CFCH's focus is on twentieth and twenty-first century musical and cultural traditions. Representatives from MITH felt the project's scale was not large enough to warrant their resources, but expressed interest in a project that addresses the "bigger picture" for music instruments in general. UMD's Ethnomusicology faculty offered specific, actionable advice for a larger project that addressed a wider scope of music instruments.

### **III. Continuation of the Project**

Through the support of NEH and the Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant Program, Adams and Wunderlich used the Two-Day Meeting to draw upon the Advisory Board's knowledge and expertise. As Project Director, Adams was able to address key objectives and indicators, outline next steps, and conduct outreach. The Banjo Sightings Database Project can now reasonably pursue Level-II funding because of this work to refine technical requirements and content requirements, address salient legal considerations, and discuss protocols about Project representation. With the completion of the NEH-supported planning period, Adams concluded that one area requires immediate attention—establishing greater practical support through collaborative partnerships.

While all respondents of the planning period outreach exercise found value in focusing on the banjo as a "test case," most generally preferred to see that the Project focus on the "bigger picture." As Project Director, the most pressing issue for Adams is to maintain a practical balance between these different communities of interest. First, he must answer to the knowledge-bearers and other stakeholders within the banjo community who desire that the "test case," the Banjo Sightings Database Project, be fully realized. On the other hand, as the outreach efforts have clearly shown, listserv respondents and representatives of institutions within the DC-metro region, who represent broader communities and possess much greater infrastructure, desire solutions to knowledge management as part of the "bigger picture" and not necessarily based on the banjo as the "test case."

Navigating the "test case" vs. the "bigger picture" issue led one listserv respondent

to propose collaborating with Adams to compose a document that a) investigates a practical solution to this problem and b) can be used to attract new partners for the Project as part of the broader application. Margaret Lam, a graduate student at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information, recognizing the need to identify a community of like-minded individuals in which to situate her own work, responded enthusiastically to Adams' project description on the Society for Ethnomusicology listserv. The Banjo Sightings Database Project provides a real-life setting for Lam to apply many of the theories and models that she is encountering in her research and to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration.

Adams and Lam will work to combine Lam's research interest in exploring the intersection of information science and the domain of music with the concepts inherent to the Banjo Sightings Database Project. The resulting document will include content about information seeking behavior for individuals in online settings and design specifications for online learning systems and communities. Using an interdisciplinary approach to research, the document will incorporate aspects of knowledge organization, community informatics, music information retrieval, and music education.

A successful Banjo Sightings Database Project promises to provide many benefits to researchers. Scholars, educators, musicians, and the general public will be able to access a common location to deeply explore the multicultural history of the early banjo, an area that is still largely unexplored outside some corners of academia and the traditional music community. Ultimately, this "test case" will serve as a model for how researchers collaboratively study the development, migration, transformation, and dissemination of **any** music instrument.

## Appendix 1: Focus of Planning Period: Objectives and Indicators

The defining event of the April-September 2009 planning period was the Two-Day Meeting of the Advisory Board for the Banjo Sightings Database Project, held at the National Museum for Civil War Medicine in Frederick, MD on June 4-5, 2009. The primary focus of the meeting was to outline a work plan and next steps for the Project by addressing a series of predefined **objectives and indicators**,<sup>3</sup> which were used as a springboard for discussion.

### ***Objective 1: Establish and Outline Requirements:***

**Indicator 1.1: Technical Requirements:** Identify the most appropriate platform and database software that is open source and scalable to the Project's data collecting needs, making sure it is interoperable with new media, which can then be aligned to create a strong, interactive web presence. This includes metadata architecture, multimedia requirements, programming outputs, and outlining best practices.

**Indicator 1.2: Content Requirements:** Map out the types of data to be collected, including measurements, a controlled vocabulary, and multimedia outputs consisting of audio, video, digital photographs, and three-dimensional imaging.

**Indicator 1.3: Intellectual Property and Other Legal Considerations and Requirements:** Consider the maintenance of intellectual property rights for scholarly analyses and interpretations of database content, copyright issues for images of three-dimensional objects as well as confirming content found in the public domain, and maintaining confidentiality of private collectors' personal information vs. those materials found in public collections.

**Indicator 1.4: Protocol Requirements:** Outline a reasonable and professional protocol for approaching public institutions and private collectors with information about the Project and soliciting the inclusion of information about their materials within the database system. This includes contacting individuals or institutions, scheduling appointments, and conducting onsite visits as a representative of the Project.

### ***Objective 2: Creating a Banjo Sightings Database Work Plan: Putting the Project into Perspective***

**Indicator 2.1: Clarify tasks that will ensure project development.** Outline long- and short-term objectives and indicators for a successful Banjo Sightings Database Project.

**Indicator 2.2: Produce an action plan** that outlines **next steps** based on long- and short-term objectives (Indicator 2.1) that will result in a formal **Banjo Sightings Database Project Work Plan**. This includes naming each phase of development and the types of supporting documentation that must be present (e.g., planning checklists, technical requirements for each task, and documentation of planning efforts).

**Indicator 2.3:** Describe what an **NEH Level II Start-Up Grant** proposal should look like for the development and production phase of the Banjo Sightings Database Project (see page 12 for current NEH Level II guidelines).

### ***Objective 3: Identifying Stakeholders for Long-Term Maintenance, Sponsorship, Partnership, and Development:***

**Indicator 3.1:** Continue to identify institutions, groups, and individuals interested in contributing to the Project, acting as sponsors, and participating in the future development of the Banjo Sightings Database Project.

### ***Objective 4: Compose a Banjo Sightings Database White Paper<sup>4</sup>***

**Indicator: 4.1:** Adams will compose a white paper outlining the Project and lessons learned during the NEH Level 1 Start-Up Grant planning period.

<sup>3</sup> The Project Objectives and Indicators outlined in this section are slightly modified from the original Project Objectives and Indicators submitted to NEH in October 2008. This is primarily the case with Objective 2: Creating a Banjo Sightings Database Work Plan: Putting the Project into Perspective.

<sup>4</sup> Since this document represents Objective 4, it is not addressed as part of the narrative.

## Appendix 2: Preliminary Meeting Agenda and Preparatory Instructions

### Preliminary Agenda for Two-Day Meeting

#### Day 1 (June 4)

- Introduction of Participants
- “Why” Banjo Sightings Database?
  - Project Overview
  - Intro to Prototype
  - Q&A
- Introduce Objectives and Indicators
- Group Discussion: Objective 1

#### Day 2 (June 5)

- Group Discussion: Objective 2
- Group Discussion: Objective 3
- Group Advisement Session: Objective 4 (White Paper)
- Closing Session: Discuss next steps for the remainder of the planning period

### Preparatory Instructions for Advisory Board before the Two-Day Meeting

- Review Project **Objectives and Indicators**, reflecting on a response to each one based on your knowledge and expertise
- Become acquainted with current Banjo Sightings Database Prototype ([www.banjodatabase.org](http://www.banjodatabase.org))
  1. Use **Internet Explorer** (Safari, Firefox, etc. run into ‘error’ messages due to programming issues)
  2. The site only has a functional “**Browse**” feature (there is no “Search” component)
  3. Data about each entry and related information is accessible through “pop-up” browser windows when you click on any links
  4. Images are not properly formatted and may take time to load
- Review schema (“back end” information) of current prototype
- Review sites referenced with the Environment Scan
- Review the page dedicated to the NEH’s Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant Level II Application
- Review Project History and Duration
- Become acquainted with the biographical information about each participant who will be attending the Two-Day Meeting

### Appendix 3: Schedule for Two-Day Meeting

#### Thursday, June 4, 2009

##### MORNING

8:30-9:00—Check-in, Social, Refreshments

9:00-9:30—Welcome, Introduction of Participants, Agenda (Everyone)

9:30-10:30—“Why” Banjo Sightings Database? (Greg Adams & George Wunderlich)

- Project Overview
- Intro to Prototype
- Q&A

BREAK (10 minutes)

10:40-12:00—Focus on **Objectives and Indicators** (Greg Adams)

- Introduction
- Preparation: **Objective 1: Establish and Outline Requirements**
- Indicator 1.1 **Technical Requirements** and Indicator 1.2 **Content Requirements** (Everyone)

12:00-1:30—Lunch (Isabella’s)

##### AFTERNOON

1:30-5:30—Sessions (Everyone)

- Indicator 1.1 **Technical Requirements** and Indicator 1.2 **Content Requirements** (continued)

**(3:30-4:00 BREAK: Tour the Museum)**

- Indicator 1.3 **Intellectual Property and Other Legal Considerations and Requirements**
- Indicator 1.4 **Protocol Requirements**

5:30-6:00—Wrap-Up DAY 1

#### Friday, June 5, 2009

##### MORNING

8:30-9:00—Check in, Social, Refreshments

9:00-9:30—Welcome, Review and Q&A regarding Day 1

9:30-12:00—Entire group to discuss and organize information about **Objective 2: Creating a Banjo Sightings Database Work Plan**

- 9:30-10:30—Indicator 2.1: Outline **long- and short-term objectives and indicators** for a successful Banjo Sightings Database Project.

BREAK (10 minutes)

- 10:40-11:20—Indicator 2.2: Produce an action plan that outlines **next steps** based on long- and short-term objectives (Indicator 2.1) that will result in a formal **Banjo Sightings Database Project Work Plan**.
- 11:20-12:00—Indicator 2.3: Describe what an **NEH Level II Start-Up Grant** proposal should look like.

12:00-1:30—Lunch (Brewer’s Alley)

##### AFTERNOON

1:30-2:30—Entire group to discuss and organize information about **Objective 3: Identifying Stakeholders for Long-Term Maintenance, Sponsorship, Partnership, and Development**

2:30-3:00—Group Advisement Session: **Objective 4: Compose a Banjo Sightings Database White Paper** Writing

- Group will offer advice in outlining and completing White Paper

BREAK (10 minutes)

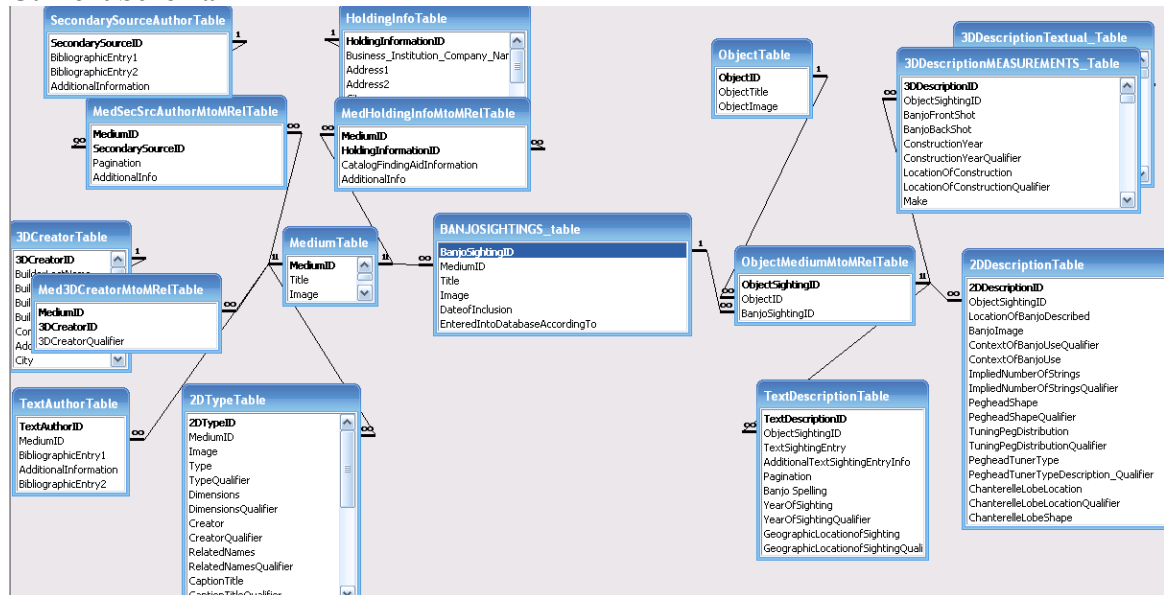
- 3:10-4:00—Closing Session: Discuss next steps for the remainder of the planning period



#### Appendix 4: Current Banjo Sightings Database Prototype Schema([www.banjodatabase.org](http://www.banjodatabase.org))

The two-day meeting will use the current prototype developed by Adams as a springboard for discussion with an initial focus on its general schema.

##### Current Schema



The schema of the current Banjo Sightings Database prototype was developed to promote a systematic accumulation of specific information, regardless of format, covering the earliest “New World” instruments and references (ca 1620s) through the American Civil War as well as selective post-Civil War sources through the 1870s and 1880s. Within the current prototype database, sample data was collected through direct engagement with primary source material found in both public and private collections as well as in secondary source material. The sample data found in the current prototype database is based on the original format of the sighting:

4. **Extant instruments**, sculptures, statues (defined as three-dimensional sightings)
5. **Renderings of banjos** as found in sheet music, photographs, paintings, drawings, and other period sources (defined as two-dimensional sightings)
6. **Contemporary written accounts** of banjo construction and performance (defined as text-based sightings)

Documentation for each banjo sighting, depending on its format, includes:

- Specific measurements
- Digital images (photographs)
- An applied analytical controlled vocabulary
- Statement-of-provenance
- Holding information (as found in both public and private collections)
- Secondary source interpretations found in published works about certain instruments

## Appendix 5: Sample of typical post sent to various listservs about the NEH-supported Project in September and October 2009

Dear List Members,

I am Project Director/Principal Investigator for an NEH Level-I *Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant* entitled [Vernacular Music Material Culture in Space and Time](#). Working with an Advisory Board, my role throughout the grant period is to oversee "planning activities for the creation of a proof-of-concept knowledge management system to allow researchers to study the development and performance history of musical instruments, using the banjo as a test case."

I am contacting this list because I am interested in your opinions as researchers. How would you benefit from having collaborative access to a knowledge management system housing information about your specific area of music research (i.e., the instruments and traditions you actively study)?

The foundational purpose of this project is to develop an extensible, moderated web-based system that will allow its primary users (researchers) to

- **collaboratively collect** information about primary source material found in both public and private collections (e.g., historical images, extant instruments, period descriptions of an instrument or the instrument's use in a performance),
- **intellectually organize** content according to provenance, physical constructs, peer-developed instrument or tradition-specific controlled vocabularies and measurements, and documentary images and other media
- **accountably connect, clarify, and update** previous generations of scholarship with new information, content, and trends in research
- **socially construct** deeper understanding and appreciation for vernacular music traditions by maintaining the perspectives that are shaping our understanding.

Beyond these points, this proposed system will be linked to instrument- or tradition-specific web-based exhibitions, forums, and social sites, informing the general public about the important work being done by the system's primary stakeholders--you.

I am pleased to report that I am enjoying great success in outlining the specific needs of those who are studying the early history and development of the banjo (ca1620-ca1870), this project's "test case," as an African American instrument and centerpiece of 19th century popular culture. As a result, I am even more enthusiastic to learn about the broader sense of need that many of you are working to address in your own domains.

If you have the time and interest, I would like to hear from you. You can contact me via email ([gregcadams@gmail.com](mailto:gregcadams@gmail.com)) and we can then make additional arrangements as needed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Greg

--

Greg C. Adams

Project Director, Banjo Sightings Database Project (Vernacular Music Material Culture in Space and Time) [http://neh.gov/news/archive/pdf/Awards\\_09Mar\\_Pt3\\_NCtoWI.pdf](http://neh.gov/news/archive/pdf/Awards_09Mar_Pt3_NCtoWI.pdf)

## Appendix 6: Biographical Information about Participants<sup>5</sup>

**Greg C. Adams** (Project Director, Principal Investigator) holds a BA in Music History from Youngstown State University (2001) and a Master of Library Science from the University of Maryland, College Park (2004). In fall 2009, Adams returned to the University of Maryland to pursue graduate work in the Ethnomusicology Program. Professionally, he recently completed project work as photo-archivist at the International Monetary Fund in Washington, DC, and has previously worked as a music reference librarian at the Library of Congress. His music research includes fieldwork in West Africa (2006, 2008), developing a formal work plan as Project Director for the Banjo Sightings Database Project through an NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant (2009), and the general study of early American black face minstrelsy and early banjo performance practice. Adams' performances and presentations consist of modern and historical interpretations of 19th century popular music, interactive explanations covering early banjo history, and information about West African musical traditions including his collaborative fieldwork with Jola ekonting players from the Senegambian region of West Africa and developing his skills on the ngoni through an FY09 Maryland State Arts Council Apprenticeship award with noted Malian master ngoni player and griot Cheick Hamala Diabate.

**Dr. Bruce Ambacher** (College of Information Studies, University of Maryland). Prior to joining the iSchool at the University of Maryland in 2007, Bruce Ambacher spent 31 years at the National Archives and Records Administration in a variety of positions relating to electronic records, digital preservation, standards and archival education. Major assignments included the FBI appraisal project, coordinating the preservation of the Iran-Contra (PROFS) and Clinton Administration electronic records; and one year as archival liaison to Lockheed Martin in the ERA competition. Other assignments included agency-wide metadata systems coordination, agency planning and policy evaluation, government-wide technology policy development and federal, national and international digital standards development. This included service as NARA's representative on the committee that developed the *Open Archival Information System (OAIS) Reference Model* and as NARA's co-chair of the committee that developed *Trusted Repositories Audit and Certification*. These experiences will help build the Banjo Sightings Database on a foundation of digital preservation standards and best practices.

**James F. Bollman** (Collector, Author, Banjo Historian) is a private collector and historian of 19th century American fretted instruments. He is the co-owner of The Music Emporium (Cambridge and Lexington, Ma.) 1974-2004 and is co-author of "America's Instrument: The Banjo In The 19th Century", UNC Press (winner of ASCAP's "Deems-Taylor Award " for excellence) as well as author of numerous articles on banjo history. He holds a B.S. Economics, Albright College, 1968 and has been collecting, researching, and trading in 19th century banjos since the mid-1960s. His collection has been featured in major museum exhibitions - Boston MFA, Corcoran Museum - Wash., DC, Stony Brook (NY) Museums, Katonah (NY) Museum of Art, National Heritage Museum (Ma),

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<sup>5</sup> Biographical content was provided by each participant

McClung Museum (U. of Tenn.), Penn State University's Palmer Museum of Art, Lebanon Valley College Museum (Pa), MIT Museum, and others. He has lectured and given gallery talks at many of these exhibitions. Along with Peter Szego, Bollman is co-founder and co-chair of the "Banjo Collectors' Gathering" - a ten year old annual convention of banjo collectors and historians. His collection of several hundred banjos and thousands of related artifacts focuses on minstrel era instruments (1840-1860) and rare "presentation" grade banjos (1860-1910) that have been featured in various books and periodicals.

**Dr. Rex Ellis** (National Museum of African American History and Culture [serving in a personal capacity]) is Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs. Prior to his current position, Ellis was Vice President of the Historic Area at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and Curator and Chair of the Division of Cultural History at the National Museum of American History in Washington, DC. His presentations, lectures, workshops and consultancies focus on public programming, diversity, and interpretation. His disciplinary interests include the spoken word and early American History with special emphasis on slavery.

**John Huerta** (General Counsel [retired], Smithsonian Institution) was General Counsel at the Smithsonian since 1995. He graduated from U. C. Berkeley Law School in 1968 and was a member of the Law Review and Order of the Coif. Huerta had his own 10-lawyer private law firm for 5 years where he was one of three partners and represented clients in Intellectual Property matters.

**Dr. Kari Kraus** (College of Information Studies, University of Maryland) Dr. Kraus's research and teaching interests focus on new media and the digital humanities, digital preservation, intellectual property, virtual worlds, image search and retrieval technologies, and textual scholarship and print culture. Before completing her doctorate in English at the University of Rochester in 2006, Kraus served as project assistant and later project consultant to the William Blake Archive, an online archive sponsored by the Library of Congress and supported by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2006-2007 she was technology evangelist for Zotero, an open-source research tool for the Firefox web browser, produced by the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University. This past fall she joined the College of Information Studies and the Department of English at the University of Maryland as an assistant professor. Kraus is a local Co-PI on a Library of Congress NDIIPP grant for preserving virtual worlds, including the multi-user virtual environment Second Life; a project participant on an NEH Digital Humanities Level I Start-Up grant on approaches to managing and collecting born-digital literary materials for scholarly use; a founding member of the editorial board for MediaCommons, a digital scholarly network under development with support from the Institute for the Future of the Book (part of the Annenberg Center for Communication at USC) and the MacArthur Foundation; and a member of the internal advisory board for Computational Linguistics for Metadata Building (CLiMB). She has taught at the University of Rochester and the Eastman School of Music, and in the Art and Visual Technology program at George Mason University.

**Darcy Kuronen** (Curator of Musical Instruments, Museum of Fine Art, Boston), curator of musical instruments, has worked since 1986 with the collection of musical instruments at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where in 2000 he organized the critically acclaimed exhibition, *Dangerous Curves: Art of the Guitar*, celebrating the diversity of guitar design over the past four centuries with 130 rare instruments from private and public collections. He is also author of the exhibition's award-winning catalog of the same name. Kuronen additionally serves as volunteer curator to the collection of historic instruments owned by Boston Symphony Orchestra. He attended the University of South Dakota in Vermillion where he received his undergraduate degree in harpsichord performance and a Master of Music with a concentration in the history of musical instruments. Membership in professional organizations includes the American Musical Instrument Society and the Comité International des Musées et Collections d'Instruments de Musique. A specialist in early American instruments, he has written several articles and lectured widely on this subject. His article, "The Musical Instruments of Benjamin Crehore," published in *The Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, was awarded the 1991-92 AMIS Frances Densmore Prize as the most significant article-length publication in English on the subject of musical instruments.

**Dr. Thomas Scheinfeldt** (Managing Director, Center for History and New Media, George Mason University) Tom Scheinfeldt is Managing Director of the Center for History and New Media and Research Assistant Professor of History in the Department of History and Art History at George Mason University. Scheinfeldt received his bachelor's degree from Harvard and his master's and doctoral degrees from Oxford, where his doctoral thesis examined inter-war interest in science and its history in diverse cultural contexts, including museums, universities, World's Fairs and the mass media. A research associate at the Smithsonian Institution Archives and a fellow of the Science Museum, London, Scheinfeldt has lectured and written extensively on the history of popular science, the history of museums, history and new media, and the changing role of history in society, and has worked on traditional exhibitions and digital projects at the Colorado Historical Society, the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford, The Louisiana State Museum, the National Museum of American History, and the Library of Congress. In addition to managing general operations at the Center for History and New Media, Scheinfeldt directs several of its online history projects, including Omeka, the September 11 Digital Archive, the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, the Papers of the War Department, 1784-1800, and Gulag: Many Days, Many Lives. Scheinfeldt will provide advice on guidance on both technological and historical matters, including database design, metadata architecture, software implementation, web design, standards compliance, digital historical and digital archival best practice, and online outreach and dissemination.

**Peter Szego** (Collector, Author, Early Banjo Scholar) is a collector of Nineteenth Century American fretted instruments and related contemporary materials such as early minstrel broadsides, sheet music, and genre images. His areas of research and publication include the early history of the banjo, blackface minstrelsy, tap dance, and African American vernacular dance. He is author of "Searching for the Roots of the Banjo," a historiography of scholarship on the early history and ancestry of the banjo, and co-

curator of the catalogued exhibition, "Birth of the Banjo," at the Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, NY. He is co-chairman of the annual conference, Banjo Collectors Gathering, and Early Martin Guitar conferences. His collection has been featured in major museum exhibitions at the Corcoran Gallery, Washington, DC, Katonah (NY) Museum of Art, McClung Museum (U. of Tenn.), Penn State University's Palmer Museum of Art, the Boston Atheneum, and other institutions.

**Dr. Robert B. Winans** (B.A., English, Cornell 1964; M.A., English, NYU 1965; Ph.D., English [American Literature], NYU 1972) taught at Wayne State University, 1970-1987 (where he retrained himself in folklore, with a special interest in folk music); Gettysburg College, 1987-2004. In addition to research related to American literature, Winans has been an active researcher on the history of the banjo, publishing a number of scholarly articles, the first in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1976, and presenting many conference papers on banjo related topics. He conducted a considerable amount of fieldwork with banjo players (some of it as a Smithsonian Fellow), especially African American banjo players, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He is currently at work on two banjo related books, one to be published by the University of Illinois Press. As a banjo player, he has mastered minstrel banjo, old-time clawhammer banjo, and classic finger-style banjo. Winans also produced and performed on a recording of early minstrel music, issued by New World Records (1985, and still in the catalog), and was one of several participants on a Rounder Records CD of Minstrel Style Banjo (1995). And he has been a collector of banjos, with a particular interest in early banjos, since the middle 1970s. As a member of the Advisory Board during the planning period of this grant, Winans will participate, both in group discussions and in offering individual advice, as an educator, banjo historian, performer, and collector, contributing expertise in all of these areas.

**George Wunderlich** (co-Principal Investigator) holds an MA in U.S. History from Concordia University and is the Executive Director of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine in Frederick, MD. He is also on the National Advisory Board of the Missouri Civil War Museum in St. Louis, Missouri. Prior to his work in Civil War Medicine, George previously founded and directed the History Center Inc., a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit Corporation, which specialized in the interpretation of mid-nineteenth century American culture. He has also been involved in the development of historically-based education programs for the Federal Presidential Management Fellows, the U.S. Military, the National Security Agency, and many others. Some of his other accomplishments relating to the early banjo include co-curator of the 2004 museum exhibit entitled "Birth of the Banjo" (Katonah Museum of Art; Peter Szego and Robert Shaw, co-curators), various consultancies with museum exhibits, and features of his restoration work in numerous exhibits and on film and TV (e.g., PBS' *The Woodwright's Shop*, County Music Television's *The Sound of Bluegrass*, and PBS' *History Detectives*). In 1992, George founded the Wunder Banjo Company, a company dedicated to the reproduction of antebellum 19th Century banjos. He has also conserved and restored over 40 original instruments for private and public collections in both the United States and Europe. It was the data collected about these instruments that became the foundation for the Banjo Sightings Database.